



## The Siege

By Ismail Kadare

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Kadare is a hugely respected novelist and a hero to his people, as well as an outspoken critic of all forms of totalitarianism. *The Siege* is a "powerfully atmospheric . . . and vividly rendered" (*The Telegraph*) novel of considerable cumulative power and resonance for our own times.

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# The Siege

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## The Siege By Ismail Kadare Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1031607 in Books
- Published on: 2010-07-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x 5.50" w x 1.00" l, .66 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 336 pages

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

First published in Albania in 1970 and translated into French in the '90s, Kadare's *(The Successor)* best of a novel traces a 15th-century Ottoman siege of a Christian citadel in Albania. Ugurlu Tursun Pasha is commander-in-chief of a vast number of Turkish infantry troops, cavalry, swordsmen and janissaries. From his pink pavilion on the plain, the pasha must vanquish the Albanians, who refuse to surrender. Readers meet several on the pasha's side during the bloody battles, including the rather hapless Mevla Çelebi, chronicler to the Ottomans, and the enlightened quartermaster general. Although there are few Albanian characters, Kadare, a Man Booker International Prize-winner and Nobel contender, crafts a story whose details add up to a glimpse into the soul of his own country. Kadare's metaphors leave no doubt that the novel is also an insightful commentary on life in late 1960s Albania, when the book was written. (*Feb.*)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

Albania's most distinguished novelist tells the story of fifteenth-century Ottoman invaders who lay siege to an Albanian fortress and find their assaults thwarted. Kadare mostly narrates from the Ottomans' perspective, but intersperses short, stylized accounts from the point of view of the besieged Christians. The novel's conscience is an official campaign chronicler for the invaders worried about how to confect a suitably stirring account from the failure and ugliness he witnesses. The resulting tone is both antic and poignant. At one point, Ottoman soldiers, unused to seeing women unveiled, look at the faces of women they have captured: "The men thought they were laughing, but they were actually sobbing. Unless it was the other way round."

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From [Booklist](#)

Kadare's captivating blend of fantasy and realism are again on ample display in his latest book to be published in English, a tale of a medieval Albanian fortress beset by Ottoman invaders. At its most basic, this novel is a suspenseful and artfully gruesome war story. Characters like Tursun Pasha, the ruminating general, and Meva Çelebi, the bewildered chronicler, are sketched with nuance yet a simplicity that keeps the focus on the grinding, perhaps unwinnable siege. But it is a rare war story indeed that can describe ubiquitous acts of war in a way that somehow resensitizes one to their violence. Kadare succeeds in doing so; in one particularly haunting passage, in which an astrologer waits to die in the suffocating darkness of a sapper's tunnel beneath the castle walls, the cliché that we all die alone is reanimated into true horror. Originally published in the author's native Albania in 1970, this book also functions as an allegory about the experience of totalitarian rule and the inevitability of conquest, even while illustrating the futility of military efforts to achieve victory. That Kadare's story continues to feel relevant today is further proof of the author's exceptional talent. --Brendan Driscoll

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**Michael Chapman:**

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